

American Badger

Description:

A badger's ecological purpose is to help keep down excessive populations of rodents. If threatened, a badger can dig a hole and disappear to safety in as little as one minute. Badgers have also been known to emerge from holes they have unearthed through blacktopped pavement and two-inch thick concrete!

Stout and Striped

You can begin identifying a badger by looking at its body. The badger is a rather robust, short-legged "weasel." With a broad, squatty body and a short, thick, bushy tail, badgers are compact and built close to the ground. Its coat is long and shaggy, especially on the back and sides. The upperparts are grizzled and grayish-yellow in color.

Next, look for the distinct markings of the badger, which include a white stripe from the tip of its nose to the shoulder area. There's also white fur that resembles a crescent around each eye and in front of each ear. The snout, the rest of its head, and its feet are grayish or blackish. The badger has large front feet and claws!

The largest subspecies of badgers are found on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains; those on the western side are much smaller. Northern badgers are larger than those from the southern parts of the range. While in some parts of their range badgers might be confused with wolverine, the badger's body is much more flattened, and the whitish markings around the face are much more distinct. Other relatives of the badger are weasels, fishers, mink, martens and otters.

Burrowing Badgers

All droppings of the badger are buried, so it's difficult to track down a badger looking for its scat. Its tracks are distinct because of the 1-2 inch middle claws on the front feet. But the best way you find a badger is by looking for its burrow.

How can you find a badger's burrow? Look for a large pile of dirt which is usually found to one side of their burrow entrance. The burrow entrance is 8-12 inches wide, with an elliptical top and a flat bottom. A badger's den may be up to 30 feet in length. That's a lot of digging! A badger does it with extra long front claws and its short, powerful front legs can move earth with amazing speed.

The burrows and associated mounds produced by badgers are important in the ecology of other plants and animals. Small mammals and a variety of other animals use abandoned badger dens. Some plants like to grow on badger hole mounds.

Squirrels Taste Good!

Badgers are most common in open grasslands, plains, and desert habitats, but occasionally occur in the mountains at elevations well above 9,000 feet. In general, they occupy the entire range inhabited by ground squirrels and prairie dogs, which they rely on for food. The diet of the badger differs seasonally and geographically with prey availability, but any animal that lives in the ground is at risk of being eaten by a badger. They hunt these animals by digging them out of underground burrows. A badger's extremely loose skin allows twisting and turning in tight spaces to catch food. Usually, ground-burrowing animals with multiple exits are the only prey that can escape.

Mortality

Badgers have few natural enemies other than man; the badger is a common road-kill victim. Large predators like bears, coyotes, wolves, and cougars occasionally kill badgers. The badger has poor eyesight but a strong sense of smell and hearing to keep it out of trouble. Like all members of the weasel family, badgers have scent glands similar to a skunk's and they will discharge (but not spray) a musk-like odor to mark their territories and when annoyed.

Reproduction and Offspring

Male badgers will mate with more than one female and usually breed in summer and early autumn. Females are able to mate when they are 4 months old, but males do not mate until the autumn of their second year. As with most members of the weasel family, implantation is delayed, and will only be successful if the animal is healthy enough to bear young. The young are born in an underground nest and are lightly furred and blind at birth. Growth and development happens quickly; the eyes open at 4 weeks, and at about 8 weeks they are weaned and already half grown. From late August through September, the offspring learn to hunt alone and disperse from the female's home range.

Hibernation?

It is a common belief that badgers hibernate in winter, but it's not the case. They sleep through several days, sometimes weeks, during inclement winter weather using fat stored in the body to survive, but they do not experience the physiological changes characteristic of true hibernation, like reduced heart beat and lower body temperature. Badgers are frequently encountered in winter, particularly on mild days, and in the southern parts of their range they are active throughout the entire year.

Range/Distribution

The badger is characteristic of the plains country, from Mexico north into southwestern Canada, from the Pacific Coast eastward to the Midwest including the Rocky Mountain States.



American Badger
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Footprint

No Map

Distribution Map

1. **Species:** American Badger
2. **Scientific Name:** *Taxidea taxus*
3. **Population:**
4. **Size:** Weight: 13-19 lbs.
Length: 24-29 inches.
5. **Diet:** Rabbits, gophers, squirrels, mice, rattlesnakes.
6. **Young:** 1-5 per year; called cubs.
7. **Lifespan:** 10-14 years.
8. **Taxonomy:** Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora
Family: Mustelidae
9. **Hunted In Idaho:** Yes
10. **Hunting Link:**